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President: Mr. Razali ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 35 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.33, L.34, L.35, L.36)

Mr. Al-Awadi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The question of Palestine is not a new item for this Organization; the General Assembly has been considering this issue for the past 50 years. Many unimplemented resolutions have been adopted in an attempt to resolve this question. This session is particularly important, however, because it is being held in the wake of recent difficulties in the peace process, a process that began with the signing by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, on 13 September 1993, of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements.

The new Israeli Government is now attempting in every way possible to hamper the implementation of this Agreement, to renege on previous commitments to withdraw from Palestinian lands in Hebron, and to impede progress that could lead to the second stage of the implementation of the Declaration of Principles, sponsored by the United States of America, in keeping with the agreement signed in Washington.

The Republic of Yemen welcomed the signing of the Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements, as well as all steps and positive developments on the road to peace. It attaches particular importance to the bilateral Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the withdrawal from Hebron and the widening of Palestinian rule, which should lead to the final stage — the establishment of a Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital. We believe that these are positive steps towards enabling the Palestinian people to enjoy their right to self-determination within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

We believe, therefore, that Israeli forces must be withdrawn from Palestinian lands — lands that have been occupied since 1967. The problem of refugees must be solved, and Israeli settlements built after 1967 must be dismantled. We believe that the status of Jerusalem must not be changed; an agreement has been reached to defer consideration of the issue. We also call on all States to abide by Security Council resolution 478 (1980) concerning the Holy City of Jerusalem.

We also call on the United Nations and the international community as a whole to continue providing assistance to the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority in order to enable it to combat economic deterioration, poverty and unemployment and to build

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economic and social infrastructures. This would promote the peace process and encourage progress in the implementation of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement towards peace in the Middle East region.

My country calls on all States that are assisting Jewish people to emigrate to, and settle in, occupied Arab and Palestinian lands to cease doing so. We call upon those States to exert pressure on Israel to stop building settlements and annexing land by force.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the conflict in the Middle East. The statements of the four summit meetings held in Cairo, Lyon, Florence and Yaoundé, respectively, in late June and early July of this year showed clearly how the viewpoint of the international community has crystallized with respect to the peace process in our region. The Republic of Yemen welcomes the statements of these conferences. We are particularly satisfied at the statement of the European Council meeting held in Florence, in which the European Union called for the respect of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and reaffirmed both its non-recognition of the annexation of East Jerusalem and the importance of the city to all parties in the region and to the international community as a whole, and this not only because of the respect due religious rights and institutions. The Union also expressed its wish to continue supporting the resumption of final status negotiations on the basis of the Oslo agreements and other subsequent ones between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The European Union also warned of the grave negative consequences of the closure by Israel of land under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. On the other hand, it commended the cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel with regard to security, noting that Israel's security can be guaranteed through a peaceful settlement respecting the interests of Palestinians and of the other parties to the peace process.

Recognizing the situation of the Palestinian Authority, which has remained committed to all the requirements of peace and related agreements, the group of seven major industrialized countries (G-7) and the Russian Federation have called for a lifting of the siege imposed on the Palestinians, which is causing them increased economic hardship, and for a resumption of negotiations on other tracks.

Such decisions are a source of satisfaction and comfort to us in the context of the peace process sponsored by the United States of America. However, the American sponsor, which has stood by the peace negotiations from the beginning, must continue to encourage their resumption and renewed impetus, in keeping with the decisions taken at the four summit meetings and with the principles upon which the peace process was initially based.

This session is being held at a time when grave developments are threatening peace and security in the Middle East region. The situation in Jerusalem and in all parts of the West Bank is explosive owing to the unjust attacks and harsh measures by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people and to the continued attempts to alter the status of Holy Jerusalem.

We condemn and denounce the practices of and the measures taken by the Israeli armed forces as well as their repeated attacks against Palestinian officials and citizens in Arab Jerusalem and other Palestinian cities, which have killed many and wounded hundreds. We denounce also the building of new settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of bypass roads for settlers, the continued siege of Palestinian lands and Israel's refusal to withdraw its forces.

We reaffirm the need to respect human rights on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we call for the protection of Palestinians in the occupied Arab territories. The Israeli Government must cease attacking and harassing Palestinian cities and villages. It must put an end to attacks by Jewish settlers against Palestinians. All of these measures violate the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, the two International Covenants on Human Rights, and other international norms of human rights.

These serious developments in the occupied Palestinian territories are likely to lead to a deterioration of the situation in the region and to a resumed cycle of tension and violence, thereby endangering peace and security not only in the Middle East but throughout the world.

Yemen reaffirms the need to move quickly towards a final settlement of the question of Palestine that will allow the Palestinian people to attain their legitimate rights, especially their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, in keeping with international law and with the fundamental principles established at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo and subsequent agreements.

We call upon the sponsor of the peace to fulfil its responsibility to bring about a resumption of the peace process to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace for the region and the world at large. We continue to hope that the international community will continue to deploy its efforts to achieve those noble goals and to avoid the scourge of war for all mankind.

Mr. De Silva (Sri Lanka): May I at the outset convey to Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the thanks of the delegation of Sri Lanka for his statement introducing the Committee's report. We wish to record our appreciation for the Committee's valuable work during the period under review.

The year that has ended has seen some noteworthy events in the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, following the many changes that have occurred since the initiative that was launched in 1991 at Madrid in the hope of ending their misery and securing a lasting peace in the Middle East. Those events are the holding of the first Palestinian elections to a Legislative Council and to the presidency of the Palestinian Authority, which are the embryonic steps towards the attainment of the final goal. Those events, in conjunction with the redeployment of the occupying Israeli forces from certain areas in the West Bank and Gaza, did in some measure contribute to the advancement of the peace process. Sri Lanka has welcomed those events as positive developments, as hopeful auguries for the future and as strengthening the institutional capacity of the Palestinian Authority.

There are, however, unhappily enough, other events that have cast a pall of gloom over these modest achievements and, in a sense, neutralized the benefits that would undoubtedly have accrued from the positive developments I have mentioned. These have been the recrudescence of violence consequent on the sense of desperation of a long-suffering people and the retaliatory measures taken by the Israeli authorities to impose a complete closure of the borders of the occupied territories, thereby preventing free movement, measures that have led to a virtual strangulation of the Palestinian economy and caused untold hardship to the inhabitants of those territories. These events have been detailed in the report of the General Assembly's Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the contents of which, understandably enough, must cause feelings of guilt in some and of embarrassment in others, which emotions some have sought to assuage by suggesting that the work of the Special Committee is superfluous and should not continue, or by desiring its outright demise, presumably because they do not wish to be reminded of such melancholy events. One might imagine that the whole object is to ensure that the United Nations take some constructive action that would bring to an end the tragic events that have occurred in that land. It is, however, a matter for regret and disappointment that there is little evidence of that happening.

The causes of unrest and the instability of the peace process are plain to any perceptive observer of events. These are the resumption of the Israeli settlement policies and their expansion and consolidation, on the one hand, and, on the other, what are in effect the necessary correlatives of such practices, namely, the confiscation of Arab lands and the demolition of Palestinian houses on the flimsiest of pretexts, which are nothing but the denial of the basic elements of human existence. They are a direct outcome of the implementation of the policies of the Government of Israel that was elected in the middle of this year. The other major contributory cause of unrest is the long-standing closure of the borders, which has paralysed all economic life and impoverished the people to an unprecedented degree. As if those miseries were not enough, the horrendous violations of human rights continue unabated, and torture as an aid to investigation has been granted the stamp of approval of the judicial authorities of Israel. Similarly, the situation in East Jerusalem is worsening, and an attempt is being made to extinguish, slowly but surely, the Palestinian presence in the Holy City. This is one of the most volatile features of the whole question of Palestine and is likely to lead to consequences of an explosive kind that would unravel the whole peace process, whose reactivation is now being sought.

Over the years, the position of the Government of Sri Lanka has remained unchanged. We have constantly held the view that the final settlement of the question of Palestine is the *sine qua non* of a just, viable and enduring peace in the region. We adhere to the view that the Israeli occupation of the territory of Palestine and other Arab lands is illegal and that the withdrawal of Israel from those territories is an absolute necessity that admits of no qualification or equivocation. The inalienable rights of the Palestinians, which follow from their undoubted right to self-determination, must be respected, including their right to independent statehood.

Conversely, all States in the region have the right to live in peace within secure and internationally accepted borders.

We acknowledge the useful rule the United Nations has played in seeking to resolve the question of Palestine. In particular, we value the humanitarian assistance rendered to the Palestinian people in the economic and social spheres, and we appreciate the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. However, the United Nations has a far greater responsibility, namely, the fundamental duty of establishing peace and security in Palestine, which is integral to the whole question of peace in the Middle East. Having taken the initial step of creating the State of Israel nearly half a century ago, it cannot abdicate its responsibility for ensuring a final settlement of this problem, which has remained intractable for so long a time.

It is a matter for regret that, where the practical effectiveness of resolutions of both the General Assembly and the Security Council on the question of Palestine are concerned, the record is very disappointing. There is perhaps no other area in which the international community has displayed such a lack of resolve, and even faint-heartedness, and such a disinclination to enforce its decision in ways and through means that are clearly open to it, than in that of Palestine. This is indeed a serious shortcoming, and one that opens the United Nations to the charge of adopting double standards in dealing with recalcitrant elements that violate international law and the universally accepted norms and standards of behaviour required of Member States. The deference shown considerations of *realpolitik* in the face of issues of justice will inexorably erode and undermine the Organization's moral authority and standing in the world.

The prevailing sense of disappointment and disenchantment among Palestinians as a result of these unfortunate events does not augur well for the peace process. The primal need of the hour is to rekindle the sense of hope among the desperate people of Palestine and generate in them sufficient trust and faith that the international community will not abandon them after holding out before them for nearly half a century the prospect of peace and the inalienable right to independent statehood that has been cruelly denied to them for so long.

Mr. Kaabachi (Tunisia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At this session, the General Assembly is considering, as it has done for decades, the question of Palestine and the suffering of the Palestinian people following the confiscation of their lands and their forcible exile at the end of the 1940s, and in the wake of the successive wars the region has experienced.

Consideration of agenda item 35, entitled "Question of Palestine", coincides with the commemoration by the General Assembly and the international community of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We believe that this coincidence is of special importance because the question of Palestine remains at the heart of the Middle East conflict. Consequently, a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict must include the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the right to live in peace and security with all peoples and States of the region, and the building of an independent state.

The question of Palestine has enjoyed the support of the international community and the General Assembly. This has encouraged the Palestinian people to continue their struggle to ensure the liberation of their lands so that they can realize their legitimate aspirations. The General Assembly has adopted at successive sessions resolutions that support the Palestinian people, reaffirm their right to enjoy their inalienable and legitimate rights, and support their struggle to that end. Here the delegation of Tunisia reaffirms the need for the United Nations to continue to play its essential role and shoulder its full responsibilities until the Palestinian people are able to realize their legitimate aspirations, including the right to self-determination, and build an independent state, in keeping with General Assembly resolutions and the principles of international law.

The international community welcomed the peace initiative on the Middle East that began at the Madrid Conference in March 1991 and the negotiations that followed, which led in particular to the Oslo, Washington and Cairo agreements. The main goal of this initiative for peace is still to ensure a just and lasting peace in the Middle East region on the basis of international law and the right of peoples to self-determination, a rejection of occupation, and the implementation of the principle of land for peace. Tunisia participated in the multilateral negotiations, as it has done since the outset.

We recognize the importance of these negotiations for the bilateral negotiations aimed at establishing a climate conducive to the exercise by the Palestinian people of the right to self-determination and at securing the right of all peoples of the region to live in a climate

of peace and security. We believe, therefore, that efforts to establish economic cooperation and to encourage trade and investment between the States of the Middle East and the countries of North Africa should be developed, but consider that this will be possible only if a just and comprehensive peace is ensured.

Tunisia, like other peace-loving States, supported the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which enabled the Palestinian people to exercise authority over Gaza and the liberated areas of the West Bank, and we hope to see full implementation of the Agreement. We hope also that negotiations will be continued so as to find a lasting and honourable solution to all pending issues and ensure Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif; the establishment of an independent Palestinian state; and the return of Palestinians to their lands.

Mr. Martínez Blanco (Honduras), Vice-President, took the Chair.

However, our fears were confirmed when the Israeli Government went back on these agreements and its commitments. Israel's reneging on the agreements concluded with the Palestinian Authority represents a slap in the face to the international community and to the sponsors of peace. This arrogance, and the danger of halting the peace process and allowing for a return to confrontation and tension in the region, are all factors in the current situation. The siege imposed on the Palestinian people in the regions where they have exercised autonomy for several months and the continued occupation of their lands, which have brought economic activity to a halt and led to a decline in trade and investment, and to a deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people, do nothing to inspire confidence — quite the contrary. The siege and the suffering of the Palestinian people can only heighten tension and increase the likelihood of violence.

Israel insists on reneging on the agreements reached on Hebron, and refuses to implement other commitments relating to the interim transitional period, thus hampering the peace process. Israel's continued policy of occupation and its discriminatory measures, human rights violations and settlement-building contravene the principles and objectives of the peace process and, indeed, stand in its way.

Israel must apply, unconditionally and in full, the agreements entered into with the Palestinian Authority and resume negotiations to arrive at a comprehensive solution. Israel must also withdraw unconditionally from the Golan and southern Lebanon in keeping with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978). The Israeli-Syrian negotiations must be continued, resuming where they left off. Furthermore, the Palestinian people must be enabled to exercise legitimate national rights, and Israel's forces must withdraw from southern Lebanon. This is the basis for peace and security in the Middle East.

The offer made to Lebanon is not valid. It is simply a delaying tactic to avoid implementation of the ultimate goal — that is, total withdrawal from occupied Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian territories.

In conclusion, I wish to recall President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's recent statement that, although we had welcomed the start of the peace process in the Middle East, we wished to express our grave concern at the halt in the partial Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations because of Israel's arrogance.

We hope that the sponsors of the peace process will ensure that the negotiations and agreements are respected so that the principle of land for peace can be implemented.

Mr. Campbell (Ireland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following associated countries have aligned themselves with this statement: Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

The past year has not been a good one in the Middle East peace process. Targets that a year ago appeared to be within reach have since become more distant and difficult to attain. There have nevertheless been some remarkable achievements that are worthy of mention. Not least of these was the holding of the first democratic elections for the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore — with the obvious exception of Hebron — all 457 Palestinian cities, towns and villages have now come under local Palestinian control. We remain hopeful that the redeployment of Israeli security forces in and from Hebron will take place without further delay so that the permanent status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority can proceed, as has been planned since last May.

We have stated on several occasions that peace in the Middle East region is a fundamental interest of the

European Union. We believe that the peace process is the only path to security and peace for Israel, the Palestinians and the neighbouring States. The European Union remains dedicated to supporting it. Our aim is that Israel and its neighbours may live within secure, recognized and guaranteed borders and that the legitimate rights of the Palestinians shall be protected.

We declare ourselves ready accordingly to play an active part in the efforts to achieve a successful outcome to the negotiations that have now been resumed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We are furthermore committed to making significant financial contributions to promote the social and economic development of the Palestinian people and to assist in the Palestinian Authority in its administrative functions. The European Union continues to be, as a whole, the major donor of funds to the Palestinians. We have already pledged 500 million ECUs in aid for the 1994-1999 period, with the goal of assisting in the consolidation of the Palestinian Authority and of improving the living conditions of the Palestinians. This is commensurate with our interests in the region and should be seen in the context of our major contribution to the peace process so far.

The essential principles on which peace for the region must be based have been reaffirmed many times by the European Union. They are already enshrined in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The key principles — self-determination for the Palestinians, with all that that implies, and land for peace — are essential to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and durable peace.

The Council of Ministers of the European Union, meeting in Luxembourg on 1 October, pointed out that urgent action was needed on several issues of great importance. We believe that action must now take place in the following areas if progress in the peace process is to be maintained: there must be timely implementation of the agreements already reached — notably redeployment from Hebron and the release of Palestinian prisoners; positive steps must be taken to relieve the economic plight of the Palestinians, including the further easing of border closures, the guaranteeing of safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank and the lifting of obstacles to international aid efforts and the realization of infrastructural projects; full cooperation should exist between the two sides in order to ensure internal security both in Israel and the areas under Palestinian authority; measures that prejudice the outcome of the permanent status negotiations must be avoided, including annexation of land, demolition of houses, new settlement construction and expansion of settlements; and the next stage of negotiations, as set down in the Declaration of Principles agreement, must begin as soon as possible.

In keeping with the European Union's desire to assist the peace process, the Heads of Government of the member States, meeting in Dublin on 5 October, reiterated their concern over events in the occupied territories at the time and reaffirmed their willingness to play an active part in efforts to recommence negotiations. They dispatched the Irish Foreign Minister on a mission to Israel and the Gaza Strip in order to convey the Union's support for the urgent revitalization of the peace process. As a concrete demonstration of our determination to play an active, constructive and balanced role, the Council of Ministers, meeting in Luxembourg on 28 October, appointed Ambassador Moratinos as the European Union's envoy to the peace process. Following this, the European Union troika of Foreign Ministers from Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands travelled to Damascus, Amman, Gaza and Cairo from 9 to 11 November for wide-ranging discussions with the regional leaders.

In conclusion, we consider it essential to reclaim the spirit of the Madrid and Oslo agreements, and we urge all parties to implement these agreements fully. There can be no alternative to a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Palestinian question and to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. The European Union confirms its attachment to such a solution and its readiness to assist its achievement in every way possible.

Mr. Owada (Japan): The Madrid Conference, held in October 1991, was indeed a historic landmark in the Middle East peace process. We in the international community have since given our wholehearted blessing to the significant progress that has been achieved and have extended our utmost cooperation to expedite the process. Japan has been an integral part of these international efforts, participating actively in the multilateral talks, in particular as Chairman of the Working Group on the Environment. It is most gratifying to note in this connection the holding in January 1996 of elections for the Palestinian Council and the concurrent establishment of the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority. These were among the most eloquent testimonies to this progress. It is worth noting that these achievements were made possible by the patient and persistent efforts of all the parties involved in the peace process, including the Palestinian people, led by Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman

of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

In recent months, however, we have been witnessing the development in the region of a distressing and even ominous new situation. The vicious circle of events that seems to have started against the background of the current impasse in the Middle East peace process — a result of the halt in the negotiations between the parties directly involved following the tragic demise of Prime Minister Rabin of Israel — has come seriously to cloud the prospects for peace. A sense of frustration has developed among the peoples in the region, and there is a danger that it could trigger desperate and destructive actions. The clashes that took place in September between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are just one of the symptoms of this dangerous situation, which, if left unattended, could affect the very viability of the peace process. These outbreaks of violence must be recognized as an expression of this frustration at the lack of improvement in the situation.

The closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which has now lasted for almost 10 months, has resulted in a sharp rise in unemployment, causing great hardship to the Palestinian people and seriously reducing the revenues available to the Palestinian Authority. Japan does not deny that Israel has the right to ensure its own national security. We in Japan recognize as legitimate the aspiration of the Israeli people to live in peace in the region. At the same time, however, it is also legitimate for the Palestinian people to insist that this right be exercised in a way that does not deprive them of their right also to live in peace in the region. Japan, while recognizing the legitimate security needs of the Israelis, urges Israel to take measures to lift the closure without delay.

The negotiations on the issue of Hebron are continuing, but a number of unresolved issues need to be addressed. Unless and until they are resolved, we cannot be optimistic about the positive prospects of those negotiations. The Government of Japan sincerely hopes that the parties concerned will address those issues in a serious manner and in good faith so that an agreement on the issue of Hebron may be reached as soon as possible, and that the agreements they have already reached on other matters will be implemented without delay. For this purpose, the parties directly involved must first of all strive to bridge the chasm of mistrust that separates them by refraining from any action that could spark further violence. At a more fundamental level, it is imperative that the parties intensify their efforts, in good faith and with steadfast determination, to advance the peace process. It is absolutely essential that both sides summon the courage to take concrete steps to implement the commitments they made in Madrid and Oslo and thereafter.

Japan has been contributing its share to the creation of an environment conducive to peace by participating actively in the multilateral talks, which have proved to be of great value in facilitating the peace process. Japan is determined to continue and further intensify its efforts in this direction. It was with this determination that in late August our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ikeda, visited the region in order to urge the parties to renew their commitment to peace and make further efforts to advance the peace process. Again, the Government of Japan invited Chairman Arafat to Tokyo in September for in-depth discussions on a range of relevant issues. More recently, the special envoy of the Prime Minister was sent to Egypt, Israel and the Gaza Strip in October to engage in an intensive dialogue with the parties concerned on advancing the peace process.

In this process of promoting peace, Japan believes that assistance to the Palestinian people is an essential ingredient in creating a favourable environment for stability and peace-building. In this spirit, Japan continues to extend assistance to the parties concerned. Since 1993, it has contributed approximately $240 million in assistance to the Palestinians. In order to alleviate the hardships of the Palestinian people caused by the closure, the Government of Japan extended $3 million in September, and only last week, it decided to extend an additional $3.5 million in emergency assistance to the Holst Peace Fund of the World Bank. It is Japan's hope that these additional contributions will help the Palestinian Authority overcome its present difficulties.

The Middle East peace process, and particularly the Palestinian track of the process, is at a crucial phase. In addition to the implementation of the agreement on the expansion of Palestinian self-rule, many difficult tasks still remain, including negotiations on a permanent status agreement. Japan wishes to appeal to the parties concerned to confront these issues with tenacity and foresight, so that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples may look forward to a future in which they can pursue their lives in peace and prosperity. For its part, Japan will spare no effort in cooperating with them in solidarity in order to promote the Middle East peace process and to contribute to the social and economic development of the region.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Last year the world's leaders marked the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. On that historic occasion, they reiterated their commitment to the principles and purposes of the Organization. They also expressed their resolve to foster peace, development, security, equality and justice in the service of peoples toiling under colonialism or any form of foreign domination or occupation.

It is unnecessary to list the issues, problems and events dealt with by the United Nations, or its contributions to settling disputes and conflicts and to preventing the outbreak of war in many parts of the world, or its positive role in encouraging development and reconstruction in many Member States.

Even though the question of Palestine has been a concern of the Organization since its establishment, it still remains on the United Nations agenda. Many wars have erupted in the Middle East; these have been a source of concern and suffering for the region and have led to countless deaths. Owing to these conflicts, the region has not been stable — and will not be stable so long as the question of Palestine is not resolved in a just manner.

The State of Bahrain is convinced that a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and on the principle of Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds, and from the other occupied Arab territories. Peace must also be based on respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within internationally recognized boundaries, and on recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially the right to self-determination. These rights are fundamental principles that have gained the full support of the international community, because they stem from the letter and spirit of the Charter. This question will not be resolved and conditions will never be stable in the region unless those rights are exercised.

In recent years we have seen signs of a new era of optimism after the positive developments stemming from the start of the Madrid peace process in 1991, which created a new atmosphere among all parties, paving the way to peace. The Arab States supported that process, hoping for a resolution that would open up new vistas for peace and stability in the region and that would command the support of the international community. The Palestinian people saw hopeful signs in these developments and initiatives and looked forward to going back to their homeland, Palestine, to end their lives of displacement and suffering. After difficult negotiations, the Oslo Agreement was signed with Israel in 1993, followed by other agreements and the start of their implementation. As a contrast to the optimism that prevailed following the signing of these agreements, however, pessimism spread in the region after statements by Israeli leaders going back on their commitment to the implementation of the provisions, and after the Israelis did not apply them or abide by the specified dates for implementation.

Time and again, Israel stated that these dates were not sacrosanct. This in turn gave rise to frustration among the Palestinians and to a loss of hope for a just political solution. Thus, bloody events took place in Palestinian cities. Israel's leaders used security as a pretext for shirking the implementation of these commitments and accords. Worse, they are now calling for reconsideration of the accords that were officially signed. Events in Al-Quds and the Palestinian territories in September due to the opening of a tunnel under Islamic sites in Al-Quds in an attempt to Judaize and conceal those Islamic sites indicate that Israel does not want stability to prevail in the region. On the contrary, Israel seeks by these actions to provoke the feelings of all Muslims. It knows that opening the tunnel was aimed against Arabs and Muslims.

We state these facts and events to show that Israel is deliberately erecting obstacles in order to halt the Middle East peace process through its repressive practices and its encouragement of radical parties and organizations to interfere in all aspects of Palestinian affairs. I refer particularly to the current administration in Israel, which pretends to abide by the peace process while it postpones the implementation of the Oslo Agreements. This is clear in the way it is addressing the Hebron issue, whose many complications make it the main question. In addition, it has increased annexations and the building of settlements, and has ceaselessly expanded old settlements. The new Israeli Government expressed its lack of desire for peace when it lifted the freeze on building new settlements and introduced other measures to expand existing ones.

The question of Palestine is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Peace and security cannot prevail in the region unless this question is solved. The right of the Palestinian people to return to their homes, in accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), is one of the main pillars of a solution of the

Palestinian question. Israeli settlements must be eliminated from the Palestinian territories; Jerusalem must be restored to the Palestinians so that they can exercise their full rights on their own land; the thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons must be released; and all agreements signed by Israel must be implemented.

Based on its eagerness for the peace process in the Middle East to continue, the State of Bahrain appeals to the international community, particularly to the two sponsors of the peace process and to the States of the European Community, to urge Israel to halt its repressive practices against the Palestinian people, implemented through aggression, expansion and settlement in the Arab territories. My country reiterates the need for the peace process to continue in the Middle East. Without a doubt, this is a strategic choice in favour of the stability and prosperity of the region. The peace process should be based on United Nations resolutions and on the principle of land for peace.

We are all hopeful that the region will begin a new era marked by peaceful coexistence and cooperation among all parties on the basis of mutual respect.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Only a few days separate us from the anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) on the partition of Palestinian territories between Arab citizens and Jewish settlers from all over the world, which led to crisis and war.

The question of the Palestinian people has long been before the United Nations. The General Assembly has devoted an agenda item to it, entitled "The question of Palestine", which has been discussed at every session of the General Assembly without arriving at a solution to the Palestinian question or at the exercise by that people of its legitimate right to live on its own lands.

The Madrid Peace Conference, which was sponsored by the United States of America and the former Soviet Union, represented an important turning point in the history of the Middle East. It was a unique occasion for the parties to sit at the negotiating table with a view to seeking a solution to the problem of the Middle East. Interim arrangements were completed — beginning with the Oslo Agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel — as were other agreements on Palestinian-Israeli and Israeli-Jordanian questions.

Hopes were raised after that positive stage that a final solution would be reached to put an end to the Middle East conflict despite the many obstacles along the road to peace. However, that stage did not last long. In fact, circumstances changed drastically after the Likud party took power in Israel. That Government announced that it was going back on commitments entered into with the Palestinian party by the former Administration. The new Administration refused to implement completely the agreements which had been concluded. This hobbled the negotiations and threatened the pursuit of peace. The reaction of the world was to condemn the Government of Israel for having gone back on agreements which it had concluded, for shirking its obligations and for using a variety of pretexts for shirking its responsibilities.

We do not hesitate to cast full blame on Israel alone. The fact is that the Government of Israel imposed arbitrary exactions on the population. These included the brutal repression of Palestinians, the imposition of an economic embargo, the confiscation of land and the pursuit of the policy of building settlements. These contradict the letter and the spirit of the agreements concluded with the Palestinian party and with internationally binding resolutions. In particular, it violates resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The status of Al-Quds is an example which shows how sensitive the Palestinian question is. No one is unaware of the significance of that city for the Arab and Islamic world, as well as for other religions. No one was therefore surprised last September when a large number of victims resulted from clashes between Palestinian citizens and the Israeli forces of occupation. This was the result of the decision by the Israeli Administration to open a tunnel close to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, ignoring Palestinian feelings, and showed that the Israeli Administration had no intention of preserving the status of Jerusalem until the final negotiations on the future of that city. The decision by Israel defied all Security Council decisions providing that the demographic and urban composition of the city should not be changed and that the Israeli declaration of that city as its eternal capital was null and void.

A resolution of the question of Palestine must be undertaken in the context of a comprehensive solution in the Middle East. Any attempt to achieve a just peace in the region is necessarily predicated on putting an end to

Israeli occupation of the Golan and southern Lebanon, in keeping with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 479 (1980). Israel's failure to fulfil its responsibility to withdraw from those occupied territories is in flagrant contradiction of the very basis of the peace process — land for peace, in keeping with the provisions of the Madrid Conference.

This policy shows that Israel is not serious about seeking peace. It is simply trying to obtain a peace which would serve its own interests and security without returning occupied Arab territories to their legitimate Arab occupants.

The deterioration of the situation in the Middle East is of serious concern to Algeria. In fact, the promising prospects which were opened up by the Madrid Conference were expected to lead to results if responsibilities were fulfilled and if negotiations were undertaken in good faith. Algeria, which has continuously supported the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace for the region, reaffirms its support, in principle, for the Madrid Conference, for the principle of land for peace and for the need to implement resolutions of the Security Council and to respect the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. These are the principles on which we base our participation in the Madrid Conference, as well as the credibility of the peace process.

We are convinced that there is no solution which can ensure a true settlement of the Middle East question other than the withdrawal by Israel from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967, and enabling the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. It is the responsibility of the international community, and particularly that of the sponsors of the peace process, to guarantee the pursuit of peace and to shelter the peace process from Israeli arrogance and non-compliance with commitments.

Mr. Al-Midhadi (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is once again meeting to consider the item on the question of Palestine, which has been on the agenda for half a century.

It was the United Nations that laid the basis for a just solution guaranteeing the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including the establishment of an independent State on its national soil. Through its resolutions it created a favourable atmosphere for achieving a just peace, which almost came about with the signing of historic agreements between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the previous Israeli Government.

We commend the efforts made by the United Nations and its organs and agencies to support a solution to the Palestinian question and to help the Palestinian people.

The hopes of the Palestinian people and our hopes flourished with the signing of the Oslo, Washington and Cairo agreements. Those agreements gave impetus to the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis, which was reflected in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the redeployment of Israeli troops from most towns of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the holding of Palestinian elections leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestinian Presidency.

But the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been hampered by the new Israeli Government, whose declared positions reveal that it is delaying the fulfilment its commitments under the signed bilateral accords. That has been clear since it took office. The opening of the tunnel next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the ensuing violent Palestinian reaction highlight Palestinian fears about the Israeli Government's stand, and affirm the Palestinians' categorical rejection of the building and expansion of settlements and the challenges and provocations faced daily by the Palestinians.

The policy of the current Israeli Government is contrary to reality, reflecting a doctrine of military hegemony and occupation and the imposition of *faits accomplis*. This intransigent position could completely destroy the peace process. Serious efforts were made for that process. Yet the Israeli Government is attempting to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State, in order to perpetuate Israeli control and hegemony in the occupied territories and to prevent the exercise of Palestinian sovereignty, riding roughshod over all the agreements and the instruments signed by the previous Government.

Jerusalem has had a unique place in the Palestinian question since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, more than 28 years ago, the Israeli Government has tried to judaize the city by distorting its identity, changing its demographic character, deporting Palestinian inhabitants and reducing their numbers through the application of military, administrative and legal measures, moving settlers into

the city and expanding Jerusalem's borders to prejudice the final status of the city. The situation in Jerusalem today is very tragic. Jerusalem is not a purely Palestinian question. It is an Islamic, Arab, Christian and international question. Hence, its resolution rests on the international community as a whole.

The State of Qatar has categorically rejected any change in Jerusalem's legal status, or demographic and geographic characteristics. We have called on the international community to safeguard and protect the holy sites there. The State of Qatar therefore supports the draft resolution presented by the Palestinian leadership. It offers a responsible solution to the question of the entire city of Al-Quds, both its eastern and its western parts. All freedoms must be respected, including the right to worship of the followers of the three divine religions. Arab Al-Quds should go to the Palestinians and West Al-Quds should go to the Israelis, on the principle of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. There must be effective implementation — if Israel has the required political will. The international community must pressure the Israeli Government to change its current position. Al-Quds cannot be wrested from the heart of Palestine; no peaceful solution can be achieved without resolving the question of Al-Quds.

The establishment of a Palestinian State and its national institutions requires a solid economic base; until now the Palestinian economy has deteriorated under protracted Israeli occupation. The Palestinian Authority attached great hopes to the achievement of peace in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Authority received from donor countries pledges of $2.4 billion in economic assistance. However, the donor countries have been slow in extending assistance. That has been complicated by the stringent Israeli security measures and the closure of the territories, which have caused a deterioration in the economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The masses are suffering as a result of those measures. The State of Qatar appeals to the international community, particularly the richest States, to extend a helping hand to the Palestinian people. We hope that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Children's Fund, agencies that have long operated in the Palestinian territories, will implement the projects recommended by the high-level working group established by the Secretary-General after the Declaration of Principles was signed to explore new activities to stimulate the Palestinian economy.

Guided by the judicious guidelines of the Emir of Qatar, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, my country wishes to support the just struggle of the Palestinian people and its legitimate aspiration to establish an independent State on its own soil. We express our grave concern at continued Israeli usurpation of Palestinian lands and the expansion of settlements in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the West Bank. Undoubtedly, the international community joins in our call for the resumption of serious, sincere negotiations on a pull-out from Hebron and subsequently the resolution of the final status of the Palestinian territories under the Oslo accords, the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its legitimate rights, particularly the establishment of an independent State of its own. We all know that there can be no lasting solution to the Palestinian question or to the Middle East problem without the establishment of a Palestinian State.

Mr. Kharrazi (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I should like to reaffirm the support of the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Palestinian people, who for decades have been struggling to regain their inalienable rights and aspirations. The people of Palestine continue to be subjected to the most harsh and inhuman treatment by the occupying Power. In the past year, the most severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods have been imposed upon the occupied territories, resulting in considerable hardship for Palestinians in their everyday life.

The latest report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/51/99/Add.2), and the reports of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/51/13) and of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35) clearly describe the destructive effects of the prolonged closure of the occupied territories on the economic and social situation of the Palestinians. For the first time, the occupied territories were subjected to total internal closure, causing much suffering among their inhabitants. According to these reports, the living conditions of Palestinian refugees have declined by 40 per cent, unemployment has increased by up to 60 per cent, and at least 10 per cent of the population of the occupied territories are believed to be living below the poverty line.

The restrictions imposed on freedom of movement have on several occasions had a catastrophic effect on the lives and health of the Palestinians, and consequently some patients requiring emergency medical treatment have died behind Israeli checkpoints. Thousands of students have missed their academic year, and many of them were arrested when their educational centres were raided by Israeli paratroopers and members of undercover units.

Killings and the detention and ill-treatment of detainees are among other practices of an inhumane nature employed by the occupying forces. More than 3,200 Palestinians, including many refugees, remain in detention, and the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices indicates that the conditions of detention of Palestinian prisoners have further deteriorated in recent years. The occupying forces continue to practices aggravated forms of torture in interrogating Palestinians, and their methods — such as violent shaking — which have sometimes resulted in death, are commonplace.

The Israeli authorities continue to pursue the policy of changing the demographic and geographical status of the occupied territories. According to the report of the Special Committee,

> "the increase in the number of settlers during the last four years was bigger than at any time in the past." (*A/51/99/Add.2, para. 830*)

The newly announced position of Israel on building new Jewish settlements and expanding the existing ones is a manifest indication of the Israeli determination to change the status quo of the occupied territories. In this context, they have also intensified the policy of demolishing houses in Jerusalem, and two months ago they decided to open an entrance to a tunnel in the close vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, causing grave concern in the Islamic world in general and in the occupied territories in particular. The continued aggressive policies adopted and implemented by the occupying Power against the Islamic sacred places and the occupation of the city of Al-Quds, which enjoys the respect of all divine religions, must be condemned by the international community. All these measures are yet further indications that the Zionist regime is untrustworthy. It is a regime that cannot be trusted to fulfil its own undertakings — one that is following its own expansionist agenda.

In April the world witnessed, with much horror and indignation, Israeli aggression and terrorism against the people of Lebanon. For more than two weeks, the civilian and economic infrastructure of Lebanon were subjected to heavy bombardment, causing tremendous damage and inflicting many casualties on the civilian population, especially on women and children. In the course of these operations, United Nations peacekeeping facilities, which were used as a refugee shelter, did not escape the brutality of the aggressor. The main objective of the Israeli action was to instil fear and terror in Lebanon.

Such actions are indeed in line with the overall policies of Israel to dominate the region through, *inter alia*, the continued occupation of Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights. The same policy is pursued through the enhancement of Israeli nuclear-weapon technology, which continues unchecked. Israeli nuclear-weapon facilities are detrimental to the entire Middle East region, and their existence threatens international peace and security. The refusal of Israel to adhere to internationally agreed treaties and put its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards regime creates an environment of uncertainty and insecurity in the region.

Such Israeli policies and practices, coupled with the non-realization of the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people, are the main reasons for the bleak situation of the Middle East today. We believe that a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine lies in full observation of all the rights of the people of Palestine, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their own land and the liberation of all occupied territories.

In conclusion, while emphasizing our consistent and principled positions, we affirm our readiness to coordinate and cooperate with other peace-loving States, as well as with the relevant international organizations, for the realization of a real and genuine peace based on the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinians.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Since 1947, when the question of Palestine was first placed before the United Nations, Egypt has been exerting every possible effort to mobilize international support for the legitimate inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly the right to self-determination and to an independent state on its homeland. The stages of the development of the question of Palestine are known to all. There is no doubt that the beginning of the peace process in Madrid five years ago marked a historic stage. Furthermore, the signing of the

Oslo accords in 1993 and the two agreements, in Cairo and Washington, in 1994, and other agreements with regard to the transfer of power, are all genuine additions to hope for the achievement of peace — a hope that is shared by all peoples of the region, particularly the Palestinian people.

The peace process was moving in the right direction — forwards — especially after the Oslo accords. Yes, the movement was sometimes rapid and at other times slower; however, the general movement of the peace process at the time was positive. This led all of us to believe that the question of Palestine was not far from a final settlement and that the Palestinian people was on the way to regaining its rights and establishing its state on its own land. However, this hope has begun to dim — indeed, it has been threatened with extinction ever since the end of last May when a new Government came to power in Israel.

Let me review with you some of the reasons which lead us in Egypt to realize how the peace process is now threatened. First, today's international community is based on the respect by States of their international commitments and pledges. Any jeopardizing of the principle of the sanctity of international agreements would revert this international community to the law of the jungle and to international chaos. In this context, Egypt notes Israel's failure to implement the deployment agreement regarding Hebron, although that agreement has official status. We note as well the new Israeli Government's attempt to renegotiate that agreement under the pretext that it is not committed to agreements entered into by the previous Government. This is an issue which has enjoyed a great deal of media attention. We would further note that, according to the provisions of the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Israeli Government is also required, as of 7 September 1996, to redeploy its forces in area B and parts of C of the Palestinian occupied territories. This redeployment has not taken place.

Secondly, the Israeli Government has a most dangerous policy which strips the peace process of its substance. It is a policy of undertaking the building of new settlements in the occupied territories and intensifying settlement activities by expanding existing settlements — indeed, by confiscating Palestinian land. I should like to put the following facts before this Assembly. The policy of creating or expanding settlements in the occupied territories is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It also flagrantly contradicts the clear provisions in the Oslo accords pertaining to the parties needing to avoid any measures which would negatively affect the negotiations on the final status. Furthermore, such a policy is a clear violation of all the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980) which make clear that such settlements are illegitimate. In addition, the creating of new settlements and the intensifying of settlement activities in the occupied territories strikes at the very core of the principle of land for peace, which together with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) provided the framework for the Madrid peace talks and the entire peace process. These tenets were freely accepted by all the parties to the talks, including Israel, as witnessed by the sponsors of the peace process and by the United Nations, as a representative of the entire international community.

Thirdly, related to this issue, I should like to recall that the peace process signed by Egypt and Israel in 1979 personifies the correct interpretation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). Based on the principle of land for peace, Egypt regained all of its territory without any settler presence in return for maintaining completely peaceful relations with Israel. This fundamental principle must apply to all other Arab territories.

Fourthly, the Israeli Government's policy of confiscating Palestinian land and its policy of settlement expansion are clear and grave violations of the provisions of the Geneva conventions pertaining to the responsibilities of occupying forces. They are also flagrant violations of the principle of the non-acquisition of land by force.

Egypt, on many levels and more than once, has warned of the grave negative consequences of the policies of settlements and land confiscation. Egypt condemns such policies, the consequences of which have not and will not be recognized by the international community. Furthermore, we believe that these are illegitimate acts, which do not give any rights to land and concerning which no commitment can be imposed on the Palestinian negotiating side. Egypt calls on the international community, through this forum, to shoulder its responsibility to put an end to such measures, which complicate the negotiations and prejudge their results.

Further, since last February, Israel, on security pretexts that lack credibility, has on many occasions imposed an economic siege against the Palestinian people, both in the occupied territories and in the cities which have attained a measure of self-rule. In this way Israel has been strangling the newborn Palestinian economy.

Dozens of thousands of Palestinians are being denied any hope of an independent economy or a developing one. This is sure to create bitter feelings of frustration, which in turn will provide opportunities for the enemies of peace to demolish the peace process. The Israeli Government, in insisting on affronting the international community by opening a tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is the only party to blame for the events of September 1996, including the bloody clashes which followed such a provocative measure.

All this brings to mind the spirit with which the Israeli Government deals with its partners in the peace process. The international community cannot expect such a spirit to lead to anything other than the current freeze in the peace process — and indeed, the possibility of a return to the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. Egypt would recall here that the Israeli Government, continuing to flout the will of the international community, has yet to implement Security Council resolution 1073 (1996), which calls for the immediate cessation of all acts which led to the bloody clashes.

Fifthly, the peace process has taken commendable steps on the Palestinian track. The Palestinians have regained part of their land and their cities. There are irreversible new facts on the ground. However, the path to final settlement remains very long. Issues such as Jerusalem, the rights of Palestinian refugees, and others continue to await the parties at the negotiating table. The Israeli Government continues to ignore these issues, even though they came up six months ago. Egypt would like to reaffirm that negotiations are not — as some try to portray them — an objective *per se*; they are a process which must be positive, which must bear fruit so that people under occupation do not lose hope for peace and lose patience that their situation will improve.

Egypt believes in the role of the United Nations in supporting the peace process. Egypt fully supports — strongly supports — efforts by various organs and agencies of the United Nations to support the Palestinian people. I should like here to mention the important seminar held by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Cairo, in May, on assistance to the Palestinian people. Egypt calls upon all States that pledged contributions in support of the efforts of the Palestinians to build their economy to respect those pledges. Without such contributions, living conditions will continue to deteriorate in the occupied territories, which would again facilitate the exploitation of the situation by the enemies of peace to obtain their objectives.

Egypt continues to make every effort to attain a just and comprehensive peace in the region and will shoulder its responsibilities. The international community has great hopes in the peace process; for 50 years now our region has not enjoyed peace. The Palestinian people looks with hope to the international community to regain its legitimate rights, and looks to the United Nations as a symbol of this international community. The Palestinian people calls for the support of its rights and of the basic principles of the peace process, as well as of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Egypt hopes that the Israeli Government will heed the appeals and messages being sent by the international community. It must cease those policies that destroy peace, policies it has been following daily. Its tactics of political prevarication and procrastination in implementing contractual responsibilities are no longer acceptable. If the Israeli Government cannot heed such appeals, if it cannot review its own policies, the United Nations, in particular the General Assembly and the Security Council, must shoulder their responsibilities under the Charter by taking measures to ensure that the situation in that vital region of the world does not continue to deteriorate.

Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan (Viet Nam): First of all, my delegation would like to join the international community in welcoming some positive developments on the Palestinian-Israeli track of the peace process that have taken place during the past year. Following the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993 and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in September 1995, important new progress has been achieved, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from major cities of the West Bank, the successful holding on 20 January 1996 of the first Palestinian general elections to the Legislative Council and the presidency of the Palestinian Authority, as well as the beginning, on 5 May 1996, of negotiations on the permanent status of the Palestinian territory. Furthermore, my delegation notes with satisfaction the relocation of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees from Vienna to Gaza City, which has resulted in closer contact between the Agency and the Palestine refugees. In addition, my delegation welcomes the recent resumption of negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, and has high hopes that this will open up an opportunity for a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Apart from the limited achievements just mentioned, my delegation considers that the Middle East peace process has been challenged by a series of tragic incidents, including the resumption of settlement activities, land confiscation and the closure of the Palestinian territory. These have caused frustration and disappointment. In this regard, my delegation is of the view that the transitional period has reached a crucial stage which requires the full and effective implementation of the agreements reached and a speedy resumption of substantive negotiations on the basis of agreed principles and confidence-building measures.

The Government and people of Viet Nam have been following closely and with great interest the evolution of the peace process in the Middle East, and particularly the question of Palestine. In this regard, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation for the great work done over the year by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The report of the Committee contained in document A/51/35, together with the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/51/678-S/1996/953, has informed us of a full range of activities carried out by the United Nations system for the promotion of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israel conflict. My delegation would also like to commend the Division for Palestinian Rights for its essential contribution as a centre for research, monitoring, the preparation of studies, and the collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine.

In addition, as mentioned earlier in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, my delegation cannot help but note the recent organization of a series of meetings and seminars concerning the question of Palestine. My delegation would like to commend the Cairo seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people held from 21 to 23 May 1996, the North American NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine held in New York from 24 to 26 June 1996, and the European NGO Symposium and International Meeting on the Question of Palestine held in Geneva from 2 to 4 September 1996. These meetings and seminars have, in our view, demonstrated the continued common concerns and commitments of the international community regarding the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people, with a view to helping it fully to realize its inalienable rights, particularly the right to self-determination and statehood.

My delegation is of the view that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. Such a settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, the principle of the exchange of land for peace, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, in particular the right to self-determination. In this regard, my delegation believes that the United Nations General Assembly can make a valuable and positive contribution to United Nations endeavours during the transitional period by continuing to promote dialogue and to educate and mobilize international opinion and action for the successful outcome of the agreements reached by the parties, in solidarity with the Palestinian people, until the final goal is achieved.

Before concluding, I would like once again to reaffirm Viet Nam's continued commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and to the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In this regard, it is necessary to respect the basis upon which the process was initiated, namely, the principle of the return of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It is equally important for the parties to comply with the agreements reached and to implement those agreements in good faith and without delay. It is essential that the international community intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and to achieve the implementation of the agreements reached and the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I now call on the observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Ansay (Organization of the Islamic Conference): I thank the President for the opportunity to address the General Assembly once again during its present session. On behalf of the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), I speak this afternoon on agenda item 35, "Question of Palestine".

We are all aware of the hopes and expectations with which the Middle East peace process was launched about five years ago. Our collective objective was to find a just

and comprehensive solution of the question of Palestine and the related conflict in the Middle East, the disastrous effects of which have left the lives and liberties of the Palestinian people shattered for almost half a century. Death, disablement, the destruction of homes, unemployment and violations of civil and human rights by the Israeli authorities have been that people's reward for wanting to live an independent, decent, hard-working and honourable life in its own land, under its own sovereignty and as a proud member of the international community of nations.

The peace process, which advanced a few steps with the signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel and the Declaration of Principles in Washington D.C. on 28 September 1995, has regrettably returned to a state of virtual stalemate. What has brought about this all too familiar state of affairs is the sum of yet another series of violations of various elements of the peace agreements by Israel and the blatant and renewed acts of aggression by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people, especially following the installation of the new Government in Israel.

The Palestinians, for their part, while continuing to resist the acts of aggression by the Israeli authorities, as they must do, have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for shouldering whatever nation-building responsibilities have come their way through certain avenues of the peace process. The newly established Palestinian National Authority has confidently assumed its functions, and through that Authority the Palestinians have commenced the process of reconstruction and development. In these efforts, they are being assisted by the sympathetic and well-meaning members of the international community, comprising many friendly Governments and several intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678) sheds some light on this aspect and states that

> "the United Nations will continue to support the peace process and to respond in an integrated way to the economic, social and other needs of the population in the West Bank and Gaza." *(A/51/678, para. 10)*

To that end, the helpful role played by the former United Nations Special Coordinator, Mr. Terje Roed Larsen, has not gone unnoticed, and I take this opportunity to express our appreciation of his work and of that of his colleagues in the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations who have collectively supported the development efforts of the Palestinian people under very difficult conditions. I should add, however, that the resources allocated to those tasks remain gravely short of the needs, and they urgently require strengthening.

We welcome the move of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to Gaza City. We would like to convey to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Peter Hansen, the assurances of our full support and cooperation in the important tasks his Agency is undertaking in Palestine as well as in the additional responsibilities he is at present shouldering in his dual capacity as United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories.

We know that pressures in both those areas are mounting, and given the reduction in resources and Israel's failure to cooperate, the fulfilment of those responsibilities cannot be easy. In fact, the much needed international humanitarian and technical assistance to the Palestinian people remains hindered by the apparent non-cooperative attitude of the Israeli authorities, who continue to enforce upon the population of today's Palestine the same restrictive bureaucratic formalities that they designed to deal with the people living under their military occupation in previous years.

In my statement in the General Assembly a year ago, I stated that experiences of this nature were, at best, at variance with and, at worst, in gross violation of the spirit of compromise and cooperation that must now characterize all current and future dealings between the Palestinian and Israeli authorities in the implementation of the peace agreements. This is all the more important now in order to establish the credibility and practicability of the peace accords already concluded and for generating confidence in the negotiations for future accords.

We in the OIC would very much like to believe that the difficulties I have just cited are perhaps only a neglected carry-over of the way the Palestinians were being dealt with before rather than the reflection of present-day official Israeli policies concerning the implementation of the peace accords. The signal here is that there is an urgent need for a change, and the time for that change is now. It will bring peace and the immeasurable benefits of peace to both the people of Palestine and the people of Israel if the peace accords are implemented by Israel with the same sincerity and vigour that the Palestinians are showing today.

I would now like to report briefly on the highlights of the OIC Annual Coordination Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held here in New York on 2 October 1996, which reaffirmed the OIC's support for the peace process in the Middle East. It endorsed the Security Council's resolution 1073 (1996) on the serious deterioration of the situation in Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) and the other occupied Palestine territories.

The meeting called for the closure of the tunnel that Israel has constructed in the Al-Aqsa area, which has become the source of great controversy. It further called for establishing the authority of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) over all Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, as one geographical entity; for ensuring the transfer of all powers and responsibilities in all fields to the Palestinian National Authority; and for establishing Palestinian national institutions and realizing the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to return, to self-determination, and to establish its own independent state on its national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as capital.

The meeting urged action to halt all measures, practices and decisions adopted by the Israeli occupation authorities in Jerusalem aimed at altering the City's geographic and demographic set-up and at violating Islamic and Christian holy places therein with a view to Judaizing the Holy City, and called for redoubling efforts to restore Arab Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty as the capital of the State of Palestine so as to ensure peace and security in the region.

It invited the international community, in particular the two sponsors of the Peace Conference and the States of the European Union, to compel Israel to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan. It requested the Security Council to set up an international monitoring committee to prevent the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian and Arab countries.

The meeting called for action within the United Nations and international institutions and forums to compel Israel to release detainees; return the deportees; halt the methods of mass punishment; cease the confiscation of lands and properties and the demolition of homes; and cease any actions that threaten life and the environment in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. It urged the international community and the Security Council to compel Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 487 (1981), to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to implement the decisions of the International Atomic Energy Agency which call for subjecting all Israeli nuclear facilities to the Agency's system of comprehensive safeguards.

The meeting reaffirmed its support for the Middle East peace process and called for the implementation of all the agreements signed and commitments made between the parties in this context, especially the principle of land for peace and United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which demand Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian Arab territories, including Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territory, the realization of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people and the redeployment, forthwith, of the Israeli army from Hebron.

Last Friday we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People with a traditional meeting to mark the occasion here at the United Nations. A message from my Secretary-General, Mr. Hamid Algabid, was among those received from Heads of State and representatives of international organizations all over the world. It was a message of peace, a call for reason and an appeal for the extension of every support to the Palestinian people to help alleviate their sufferings after many years of occupation, repression and denial of the exercise of their national human rights. It is now up to the international community, the Member States represented in this body, to react and respond in the manner that the time and hour demand.

Our collective resolve to support the ongoing peace process must be maintained, for herein lies the opportunity for uniting efforts for the attainment of peace, tranquillity and progress for Palestine, Israel and all other countries in the Middle East and beyond that stand to gain immeasurably by the long-awaited positive turn of events in that troubled region. It is incumbent upon the membership of this great world Organization to ensure that in the few remaining years of the twentieth century, this opportunity is taken, and not lost.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I shall now call on the representative of Israel, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): Several previous speeches referred to General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947. As the meaning and context of this resolution were misrepresented, I would like to set the record straight.

Forty-nine years ago the General Assembly adopted a resolution in favour of the establishment of two States in British mandated territory of Palestine — the State of Israel and an Arab State. The Jews living under the British mandate accepted this resolution and established the State of Israel on 14 May 1948. The Palestinians, unfortunately, with the support of all the Arab countries, rejected the resolution and launched a war against the newly reborn State of Israel.

This fact is clearly recorded in the United Nations Palestine Commission's First Special Report to the Security Council of 16 February 1948:

> "Powerful Arab interests, both inside and outside Palestine, are defying the resolution of the General Assembly and are engaged in a deliberate effort to alter by force the settlement envisaged therein." (*A/AC.21/9, para. 3 (c)*)

The Representative of the Palestine Arab Higher Committee, in his statement to the Security Council on 23 April 1948, stated:

> "We have never concealed the fact that we began the fighting". (*Official Records of the Security Council, Third Year, No. 62, 287th meeting, p. 14*)

> "The Arabs did not want to submit to a truce which would have brought shame upon them, as they rather preferred to abandon their homes, their belongings, and everything they possessed in this world, and leave". (*Ibid.*)

When Israel's war of Independence ended a year later, some Palestinians became citizens of Israel, others became citizens of Jordan, some became subjects of Egypt and some became refugees in Arab countries. Israel's position is that any solution to the problem of refugees should include their integration into the countries in which they reside, as Israel did with the Jewish refugees from Arab States. This issue will be negotiated, together as other issues, as part of the final status negotiations between the two sides.

It is one of the ironies of history that 29 November has been selected as "Palestine Day" and the date of the traditional opening of the debate on the question of Palestine in the General Assembly, for it was the Palestinians who rejected the resolution adopted on 29 November 1947 and initiated, with the help of the Arab States, hostilities against the State of Israel. By doing so, they brought tragedy upon themselves and the region, imposing a great obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, and prolonged the search for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Palestinians misrepresent the conflict by suggesting it began only in 1967, when Israel came into possession of the West Bank and Gaza following a war of self-defence. It must be remembered that the Palestinians, with the assistance of the Arab States, began an open war with Israel 19 years prior to that, in blatant violation of United Nations resolutions.

We hope that the lessons of the past were well learned and that we may now turn our energies towards building a brighter future.

I also hope that the words of the Palestinian representative who spoke in this debate do not reflect the position of the Palestinian leadership which signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or of the Palestinian people who demonstrated their support for the peace process during the recent elections for the Palestinian National Council.

I trust that an agreement on Hebron will be reached soon, and I call again upon Chairman Arafat not to delay its signature any further. Peace will come only through direct negotiations without preconditions, free from external pressures.

Israel believes that issues related to the permanent status should be negotiated between the parties themselves and that the United Nations should not pre-determine the outcome of the talks. I concur completely with the position of the European Union, stated earlier today, that measures that prejudge the outcome of the permanent status negotiations must be avoided. Surely this should also refer to the draft resolutions before us.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Observer of Palestine has asked to be allowed to reply to a statement made by one of the speakers. I shall call on him on the basis of General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: It is regrettable that the representative of Israel is continuing to insist on destroying what remains of the positive environment surrounding the situation in the Middle East and the peace process.

I should like to make some brief observations. First, as regards General Assembly resolution 181 (II), perhaps the representative of Israel has completely forgotten that that resolution called for the creation of a Jewish state and an Arab state. It also called for Jerusalem to be an independent international entity. The representative of Israel stated that Israel accepted the provisions of the resolution. It appears that he has also forgotten that less than two years later, Israel began to violate the provisions of resolution 181 (II) by declaring Jerusalem to be its capital. It set aside all the conditions laid down by the General Assembly for accepting Israel as a Member of the United Nations, including the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III).

The situation of Palestinian refugees is one of the gravest refugee crises in the world; it is also one of the oldest. This tragic situation was created by Israeli terrorism. Defenceless people, faced with military oppression by armed gangs, fled their homes and their property; thus an entire people was uprooted from its homeland. Those refugees have inalienable rights, as provided for in resolution 194 (III) — the right to return to their homes, like any other refugees in the world; and the right, for those choosing not to return, to be compensated for their property.

The world is right to have chosen 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People because the goal of creating an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, still stands. Perhaps the time has come for Israel to realize that, from time to time, it must conform its positions to the will of the international community and not go against the current.

The Palestinian side is negotiating seriously in order to overcome the obstacle posed by Hebron and to implement the agreements already reached by both parties. We are insisting that these agreements be implemented without amendment, while the Israeli side, most regrettably, is insisting on reaching a new agreement. Many unacceptable demands are now being put forward.

Once again, the time has come for the Israeli side to abide by its agreed contractual commitments. It must put aside prevarication and procrastination as well as its tendency to blame the other side. There is a long list of Israeli tactics — very long indeed and very difficult to describe in such a short time. However, if the Israelis truly wish to achieve peace, the road is clear — the immediate implementation of all the provisions of the agreements already concluded, and the start of final status negotiations on the basis of the political and legal premises agreed on at Madrid.

Finally, any representative speaking in the General Assembly or in any of its Committees on behalf of Palestine is representing the Palestinian position in all its facets with the required seriousness.

We cannot under any circumstances accept any rude intervention in our internal affairs.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): Israel intends to continue, together with the Palestinians, the march towards peace until we reach our goal of a full peace between the two sides and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

However, to refer to 29 November 1947 and resolution 181 (II) and to suggest that it was acceptable to the Palestinians is, I think, an attempt to rewrite history. I regret only that the Palestinians did not have this positive attitude towards peace with Israel in 1947, and that we have had to wait so many years to begin together with the Palestinians, the march towards peace. However, I have no doubt that we will achieve peace with the Palestinians, and I suggest that we all work together to that end.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I should like to inform members that the General Assembly will consider draft resolutions A/51/L.33, L.34, L.35 and L.36 on Wednesday, 4 December, in the morning.

The President took the Chair.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to recall that today is the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

As members are aware, the General Assembly, by its resolution 50/167 of 22 December 1995, decided, *inter alia*, to devote one meeting of the fifty-first session of the Assembly to the discussion of the problem of trafficking in human persons, especially women and children.

I should like to remind members that, as previously announced, the Assembly will hold a plenary meeting on Friday, 6 December, in the morning, devoted to the discussion of this question.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.